

Seventh Sunday after the Epiphany – Epistle

“I MEANT WHAT I SAID AND I SAID WHAT I MEANT,

CHRIST JESUS’ WORD IS ONE HUNDRED PERCENT”

2 Corinthians 1:18-22

Seventh Sunday after the Epiphany

Analysis by Timothy J. Hoyer

18As surely as God is faithful, our word to you has not been “Yes and No.” 19For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we proclaimed among you, Silvanus and Timothy and I, was not “Yes and No”; but in him it is always “Yes.” 20For in him every one of God’s promises is a “Yes.” For this reason it is through him that we say the “Amen,” to the glory of God. 21But it is God who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us, 22by putting his seal on us and giving us his Spirit in our hearts as a first installment.

DIAGNOSIS: The First Word is “No”

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) – *Saying ‘Yes’ To Look Good*

People will say “yes” to be polite and then never follow through on what they said yes to. As a result, there are not enough cookies as the PTA meeting; a friend does not come to your Tupperware party; an abuser hits again; those who promised to call after the funeral never do; and St. Paul did not visit

Corinth as he said he would. We also expect God to say “yes” to our prayers. But when we are not relieved of some trouble, when the test results come back with bad news, we get mad at God and despair of God’s love for us. The Corinthians despaired of Paul’s love for them, and by connection, despaired of God’s grace for them. In addition, they experienced God’s “no” spoken through the law. Not just, “No, you can’t do that,” but, “No, you are not right, you are not good, and no, you don’t deserve my love.” Oddly, that “No, you don’t deserve my love” is even said to those who are obedient and kind and bake the cookies and call after the funeral.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) – We Aimed At “Yes” But Hit A “No”

How do we respond when people don’t do what they have promised? We get upset. We trusted their “yes” and now we are disappointed. In our hurt we try to heal our pain by using the salted wisdom of never talking to them again, never inviting them again, never trusting them again. The Corinthians, for example, did not want to listen to Paul. He had caused them enough trouble. How could his message about God be any more trustworthy? Isn’t that just the way it goes? People can’t be trusted according to what they say. God can’t be trust by what God says. And that goes double for God’s law that says, “No, you don’t deserve my love” to those who break their word and to those who keep their word. We think we are smart about where to put our trust. We know whose word to doubt. But we have missed the mark about what our trust is to be aimed at. We have aimed it at people, we have aimed at God’s law, we have aimed it at what happens to us in life, and we have not aimed it at Jesus.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) – God Says, “No”

Since we aim our trust at other things instead of at God’s “yes,” we have hit the mark of God’s “no.” God’s “no” really does mean “no.” God’s “no” is for those who put their trust in

the wrong places. Trust belongs to God. Those who take God's trust and put that trust in other things, they have made those things their god. God is jealous of those other gods, because those gods do us no good. Those gods do not give life. They are gods who twist us around so that we cause harm to others by our grudges, by our anger, and by our retaliation. So we hurt creation and break God's commandment that only God is to be our God. The law is right. Such destroyers and disbelievers do not deserve God's love. Thus, they are left with death.

PROGNOSIS: The Last Word Is "Yes"

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) – God Says, "Yes!"

But, the Son of God, Jesus Christ, his word is always "yes." Every one of God's "yes's," God's promises, are kept by Jesus. Jesus took all of God's "no's," the entire law saying that we deserve nothing, the death meant for us, and he suffers them to death. They have had their say. Now God has the final word. Now God speaks with authority (see Mark 2:1-12 for this Sunday). God raises Jesus from the dead! Jesus is God's "Yes!" Jesus is God's "Yes!" of forgiveness, of mercy for destroyers and disbelievers, of life for those who die, and the Spirit for those who despair.

Step 5. Advanced Prognosis (External Solution) – We Say, "Amen"

Jesus is given to us as God's "Yes!" Jesus is whom we look to for God's help, God's presence, God's grace, and God's glory. Jesus is the mark that we aim our trust at. Jesus, the Son of God, raised from the dead, is what we look to instead of life's experiences. The dazzling light of Christ shines in the dark of all the negatives we get each day, from friends saying no, to doctors saying no, to children whose only words are no, no, no. The light of Christ dispels the darkness of the law's no's, for he gives forgiveness and life even to those the law says don't deserve it. To Jesus, non-deservers who trust him are given God's final yes. Faith in Christ does it all. Faith in Christ is

our “amen” to God’s glory. For God is holy, righteous, glorious because God makes us holy, righteous, and glorious through Christ.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) – *We Already Look Good And So Say Yes To Make Others Look Good*

Paul speaks God’s “Yes” by proclaiming Christ to the Corinthians. So, if he does not visit the Corinthians, it is so that God’s “Yes” in Christ will not be forgotten because of Paul’s presence. So Paul makes his decisions so that God’s “Yes” in Christ will be proclaimed. As in the gospel, Jesus rebukes the unclean spirit so that God’s “Yes” can be given to the man. God’s “Yes” is given, not in the casting out of the unclean spirit, but in Jesus himself. He is the one who has the authority to give God’s mercy to those who don’t deserve it. Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit so that God’s “Yes” could be heard, not in the rebuking, but in Jesus. Just so, whenever we say “yes,” we do so, not to look polite and friendly, but in order that those we say yes to may believe—not in the our yes or no, but in Jesus. “To be truly yes, a yes is said in faith for faith. Otherwise, a work remains merely good, and our primary authority to forgive sin is in danger of being lost” (Sabbatheology, Gospel, Epiphany 7). We say yes, so our friends can hear that God’s “Yes” in Christ, by our neighbors at the PTA, or by the church member whose spouse died.